Mal Berisha

A BRIEF HISTORY

OF THE ALBANIAN DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

1912 – 1939

(Pre-state, Independence, First Republic, Kingdom)

Albanians have shown their diplomatic capacities much earlier than the independence in 1912. Even during the epoch under our National Hero, Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg in the XV Century Albania had diplomatic relations with the Venice Republic, the Kingdom of Naples and Vatican.

During the Ottoman rule, two outstanding hommes d'état led two powerful states and their diplomacy – Mehmet Ali Pasha of Kavalla, founder of modern Egypt who ruled there during 1805 – 1849 is well-known for his diplomacy with France and England, in particular. Likewise, Francesco Crispi, an arbëresh (Albanian descendent of Albanians who settled in southern Italy after Skanderbeg's death) as Prime Minister of Italy for two terms did also lead Italian diplomacy in two important periods, from 1887 -1891 and 1893 – 1896. Meanwhile, the relations of Ali Pashë Tepelena with foreign missions and consulates are historically recognized.

It should also be emphasized that the new Albanian state was founded by one of the most prominent diplomats of the Ottoman Empire, Ismail bej Vlora. His whole life prior to independence on 28 November 1912 was closely connected with diplomacy. The proclamation of independence by him was the outcome of the ardent patriotic feelings combined with high diplomatic skills in the historical specific circumstances of that time.

One of the first and most important acts of the Albanian Government led by Ismail Bej Vlora was intensive diplomacy, when half of the territory was left out. Despite its limited resources, at the head of Government of Vlora he did its best to gain recognition and support by the great powers. To this end, he took advantage of personal friendships or lobbyists as they are called today from countries with a major decision making impact. This support was accredited to his noble diplomatic qualities.

Afterwards, in December 1918, Albania succeeded to establish what is known as the Government of Durrës with Turhan Pashë as Premier and Mr. Myfit

Libohova as Foreign Minister. Its diplomacy reached the culminating point with its participation of the Albanian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, also with the noticeable presence of the US diplomat Charles Telford Erickson, as a delegate from the Albanian Association VATRA in USA. His correspondence with US President Wilson has played a very great role in preserving Albania. Members of the Albanian delegation were also Luigj Bumçi, Mihal Turtulli, Mehmet Konica and Prime Minister Turhan Pasha himself.

The year 1920 became historic with the" National Congress of Lushnja" and the emergence of the new government of Sulejman Delvina with Mehmet Konica as Foreign Minister. The most important achievement of this Government was Albania's admission as the 43d member state of the League of Nations and the presentation by Ambassador Fan Noli of the Albanian issue at its Conference in Geneva.

Albanian diplomacy at that time was supported by the greatest friend of Albanians, the British politician Aubrey Herbert with the unsparing help of British Lord, Robert Cecil, Canadian Rowell and Indian Ali Imam. After sending ambassadors in Britain and Austria – Hungary, the first Consular Representations and Honorary Consuls were in place. On 26 October 1926, the State Regency appointed Dr. Charles Telford Erickson in Washington and Fuad Dibra in Istanbul. Eugene Pitard was sent to Geneva as Honorary Consul, Loyon Thompon in London and others.

In 1921, Great Britain sent to Tirana as Minister Plenipotentiary Harry Charles Augustus Eyres, the first accredited high ranking diplomat, marking in this way the establishment of diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Two months later, Albania sent in London its Ambassador, Mehmet Konica, again, the first Albanian senior diplomat there.

At that time, Foreign Minister Pandeli Evangjeli opened up a series of diplomatic offices in Washington, Istanbul, Vienna, Bucharest, Paris, Alexandria and Geneva. In Washington, it was Mr. Kostandin Çekrezi and then Dr Kostandin Tashko. In Paris it was Mit'hat Frashëri, while France on its turn appointed Jean Beguin Billecocq, as Chargé d'Affaires in Tirana. Of special significance to this

end was the opening of the first US diplomatic Mission in Tirana on 28 July 1922 with Mr. Maxwell Black as its representative, replaced later by Minister Plenipotentiary Grant Smith. A prominent name of Italian diplomacy, Marquis Carlo Durrazo was sent to Albania from 1922 – 1925; whereas Mr. Ali Asllani was appointed in Trieste Italy. Likewise, Hungary appointed its Envoy Earl Albert Menes de Hidveg in 1922.

Thereafter, the diplomatic service map of the Albanian state was extended towards Sofia with Mr. Viktor Plumbi and later Konstandin Boshnjakun as Chargé d' Affairs.

Albeit these efforts, the Albanian Foreign Ministry was not properly structured yet. Therefore, Foreign Minister Pandeli Evangjeli asked the Parliament in early February 1923 to adopt the structure.

Many Honorary Consuls were appointed in important capitals and centers, as in Brindis, Luxembourg, Turin, Leipzig, Prague, Stockholm, Copenhagen, München and elsewhere. Meanwhile, in January 1923, the Hellenic Kingdom opened up its office in Durrës. The Albanian Government sent instantly in Athens Mid'hat Frashërin as Minister Plenipotentiary. Germany opened their office in Tirana in 1923, whereas Albania reduced its presence for 13 years on end with the activity of its Honorary Consuls there.

The Government that emerged after the June Revolution 1924 led by Fan Noli suffered from a very large international diplomatic isolation, especially after the request to open a Soviet diplomatic representation in Tirana.

After Zog's return and Albania's proclamation as Republic with him as President, the prominent intellectual Myfit Libohova was appointed Foreign Minister and his brother, Eqrem in Rome. During that period, an almost total replacement of the Diplomatic Corps took place with senior diplomats loyal to President Zogu.

They were mostly from those who have studied abroad in the Italian schools and especially its military academies; yet, there were also reputable names from previous Albanian governments at the head of the diplomatic missions

abroad as the famous intellectuals and diplomats. Iliaz Vrioni, Eqrem Libohova, Xhemal Frashëri, Medi Frashëri, Xhemal Dino, Eqrem Vlora and Ali Asllani.

During that time, other prominent names of Albanian diplomacy appeared as Rauf Fico and the well-famed writer and patriot Faik Konica; the latter opened up the Albanian Legate in Washington.

Meanwhile, a new momentum arrived in the very tensed relations with Greece; this was accredited to the valuable contribution of the Arvanatas Pangallos (Albanian descendent of ancient Albanians who fled to Greece after Skanderbeg's death in 1468) who was elected at the head of the Greek Government. He outlawed the pan northern Epirus organizations and this help interrupt for a certain period the territorial claims against Albania.

Then, another prominent name shone in the Albanian diplomatic service, Eqrem Bej Vlora; he was appointed in London to follow up the British support for Albania in the course of endless troubles with Belgrade.

A scandal with a Serbian Montenegrin spy called Vuk Gjurashkovic caused the suspension of relations between Belgrade and Tirana and the withdrawal of Ceno beg Kryeziu, a notorious diplomat.

The 22nd November 1927 marks the signing of the so-called Second Tirana Pact by the Albanian Foreign Minister Iljaz Vrioni and his Italian counterpart Ugo Sola. They kept the third part of the First Pact of 1925 and accepted other additions. Meanwhile, the Greek government was not holding to its pledges for the Çami population and thus the situation went from bad to worse until Foreign Minister Iljaz Vrioni lodged a complaint to the Secretary General of the League of Nations, Erich Drummond. As usually, the Greeks through their Foreign Minister Politis rejected all Albanian demands.

The proclamation of the Republic of Albania in 1928 found its diplomacy in an entirely new situation but with Iljaz Vrioni remaining Foreign Minister. Within a few days, the new Republic was recognized by over 25 states ; however, there were some countries, like Turkey that not only did not recognize it, but it even suspended diplomatic relations with Albania for three years. Finally, relations

with Turkey were re- established in 1932 and Mr. Nezir Leskoviku became Chargé d' Affairs in Ankara.

During this time, the modern organic Law on the Diplomatic Service was enacted. Accordingly, Albania set up a relatively admirable diplomatic corps and very well distributed all over the world, certainly dependent from it budgetary constraints.

The profound economic crisis that broke out in 1932-1933 forced the government to cut by 50 per cent the budget for the diplomatic service. Accordingly, the Foreign Ministry remained with only 14 officials, including the Foreign Minister and its Secretary General. The same drastic cuts affected also the diplomatic representations abroad and the best diplomats were sent to the most important capitals; Xhemal Dine in London, Rauf Fico in Belgrade and Nezir Leskoviku in Ankara. A number of senior diplomats left their foot prints with image and activity. Among the most notable were Dhimitër Kosturi, Konstandin Mima, Kosta Meksi, Pandeli Nase, Zef Prenushi, Asaf Xhaxhuli, Qmal Jusufati, Remzi Çelo, Sofokli Comorra and Tahir Shtylla.

The modern system of diplomatic recruitment by contests started to function well in the Ministry. Many candidates competed in 1936 and were appointed – Hamid Kokalari, Angjelin Kakarriqi, Mikel Çoba, Stavri Katundi, and laer on Jani Evangjeli, Felatun Vila, Petro Kisi, Rexhep Shazi, Asllan Ypi, Xhahid Koka, Sotir Avrami, Nush Bushati, Lazer Çetta, Mikel Çoba, Ferid Dervishi, Qenan Dibra, Rasi Dino, Xhemil Dina, Vasil Dogani, Alexander Stavre Drenova, (Asdreni), Dervish Duma, Dhimiter Engjelli, Jani Evangjeli, Rauf Fico, Medi Frashëri, Mid'hat Frashëri and many others.

In this regard, it is worth- mentioning the text of the decrees for Ambassadors and Ministers Plenipotentiary which at that time read as follows:

"...I expect from him zeal and loyalty in office, fair services with a pure national consciousness for our Albanian Republic"

When Albania became Kingdom, a great deal of attention was devoted to the patriotic education. This maybe also seen in the text printed on each passport:

“You should know and be certain that your luck and happiness are in Albania whih gives you honour and grants yoo the name “ Albanian”; uphold with pride the national character and the Albanian pride; obey to the countrys’ laws and orders, wherever you are; each and every single Albanian is your brother: respect him whenever and help him in need”. Don’t humiliate your mother tongue by speaking a foregn language when it is not necessary. Honour the banner of your Fatherland for he who does not honour the sign of nationality, dishonours himself”

During the same point of time, the US diplomatic service was reinforced with a great name of acknowledged international reputation: Minister Plenipotentiary Herman Bernstein, poet, writer, investigative journalist, explorer, historian, friend of three USA presidents, Theodor Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover. He was a Lithuanian Hebrew who had emigrated in USA and a great well-wisher of Albanian people. Bernstein helped American schools in Albania as the Agricultural School in Kavaja and the Technical College in Tirana; he did also provide assistance to the Foundation “Rockefeller” against Malaria disease that was making havoc in Albania; Bernstein wrote brilliant books on Albania as well. He served from 1930-1933 and despite his short life (1867 – 1935) he left behind a significant heritage which holds Albania at high esteem. He is also the first biographer of King Zog. A diplomat of that format has never been appointed in Albania prior or even after him from any foreign country to date.

During the years ’30 Mussolini increased the pressure against Albanian Kingdom to renew “Tirana Pact” with new terms & conditions designed to turn it into a full protectorate of Italy. Under these circumstances, the Albanian diplomats found themselves to be under extremely hard conditions everywhere. The Italian Foreign Minister who was also Mussolini’s son – in – law was also exerting a growing pressure over Albanian diplomacy. However, neither the attempts by Jakomon nor the maneuvers by traitor Zef Serreqi, did convince King Zog to admit the Mussolini project to pass the sovereignty of Albania in the hands of the King Victor Emmanuelle III.

Thus, on 7 April 1939, Albania was occupied by fascist Italy and the activity of the Albanian diplomatic service was disrupted. The diplomats usually remained in the countries where they were accredited but as emigrants now. Some of them returned to Albania or emigrated to democratic states like USA, Britain, France and elsewhere. The majority of those who returned to Albania after year 1944 were condemned by the communist regime with death penalty, imprisonment, and internment. No one knows if any of them survived to see the overthrow of communism in '1990.[3]

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[1] *This article is written based on historical facts about the life of Ismail bey Vlora, Muhamet Ali Pashe Kavalla, Francesco Crispi and the book of Pr. Dr Uran Asllani, "Diplomatët shqiptarë 1912-1939" (Albanian Diplomats, 1912-1939)*

[2] This article is published in a brochure published by the Albanian Council of Ambassadors, Tirane, 29 May 2019

[3] Translated by Prof.Dr Jorgji Kote.